



UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

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HUMAN RESOURCES
DIVISION

B-215396

JUNE 12, 1984

The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye
United States Senate



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Dear Senator Inouye:

Subject: Do Skilled Nursing Facilities Have Enough
Wheelchairs to Meet Their Patients' Needs?
(GAO/HRD-84-69)

This is in response to your request for information on the number of wheelchairs skilled nursing facilities (SNFs) have available to meet the needs of their patients.

OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

We had two objectives. The first was to obtain data on the approximate proportion of SNF patients that need wheelchairs or otherwise need assistance in walking or moving about. Second, we wanted to determine whether selected homes had enough wheelchairs available to meet their patients' needs. To meet the first objective, we obtained data from the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) which was contained in the "Medicare/Medicaid Skilled Nursing Facility Survey Report" and entered into the Medicare and Medicaid Automated Certification System (MMACS). The information was contained in the following line items in the survey reports.

- F 152 Patient Census on Data of Survey
- F 153 Number of Completely Bedfast Patients
- F 155 Number of Patients Requiring Assistance With Ambulation (i.e., wheelchair, walker, cane, etc.)

(106268)

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RELEASED

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According to HCFA officials only regions 4 and 8 enter this information into the computer system regularly, and region 1 enters it intermittently.¹

To meet the second objective, we visited 14 nursing homes in Georgia which we were auditing in connection with another assignment to obtain information on (1) the total number of patients at the date of our visits, (2) the number of patients in need of a wheelchair, (3) the number of wheelchairs available for use (excluding any privately owned chairs), and (4) the number of privately owned wheelchairs in use. The 14 nursing homes consisted of 10 SNFs, 3 combination SNFs and intermediate care facilities (ICFs), and 1 ICF. Thirteen were privately owned facilities and one was government owned.

Our review was made in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

HOW MANY SNF PATIENTS NEED WHEELCHAIRS?

While there are large variations among individual facilities, it appears that overall between 50 and 60 percent of SNF patients need wheelchairs. The data from MMACS are summarized in the following table.

<u>Region</u>	<u>SNFs in data base</u>	<u>Patient census</u>	<u>Bedfast patients</u>		<u>Patients requiring assistance with walking or moving about</u>	
			<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent of census</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent of census</u>
1	204	16,267	318	2.0	8,697	53.5
4	1,329	99,290	4,576	4.6	50,556	50.9
8	384	31,798	640	2.0	19,220	60.4

¹HCFA region 4 is in Atlanta and consists of the states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Region 8 is in Denver and consists of Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming. Region 1 is in Boston and consists of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

On a state-by-state basis the data for regions 1 and 4 are relatively consistent. Except for Vermont, where 40 percent of the patients required assistance with ambulation, the percentage ranged from 51 in Rhode Island to 56 in New Hampshire. In region 4, the percentage ranged from 43 percent in Kentucky to 62 percent in South Carolina. In region 8, however, the percentage ranged from 48 percent in Colorado to 79 percent in North Dakota. We have no explanation for these variations.

HOW MANY WHEELCHAIRS DO
SNFs HAVE AVAILABLE?

Ten of the 14 facilities visited in Georgia did not own enough wheelchairs for the number of patients needing them. However, when the privately owned wheelchairs furnished by the patients were considered, only 2 of the 14 homes had insufficient chairs. At both of these SNFs we were told that (1) additional wheelchairs were being purchased and (2) nonmobile geriatric chairs specially designed for the elderly were available. The following table shows the results of our analysis.

<u>Home</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Total number of patients on date visited</u>	<u>Number of patients needing wheelchairs</u>	<u>Number of wheelchairs owned by facility</u>	<u>Gross shortfall (excess)</u>	<u>Number of wheelchairs privately owned</u>	<u>Net shortfall (excess)</u>
1	SNF/ICF	92	15	23	(8)	0	(8)
2	SNF/ICF	192	70	73	(3)	2	(5)
3	ICF	69	20	14	6	9	(3)
4	SNF	41	33	21	12	18	(6)
5	SNF	159	46	61	(15)	18	(33)
6	SNF	109	57	17	40	36	4
7	SNF	70	48	31	17	17	0
8	SNF	126	104	66	38	38	0
9	SNF	100	48	12	36	36	0
10	SNF	77	47	23	24	30	(6)
11	SNF/ICF	102	39	24	15	18	(3)
12	SNF	91	63	66	(3)	3	(6)
13	SNF	117	106	50	56	35	21
14	SNF	<u>99</u>	<u>53</u>	<u>43</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>(20)</u>
Total		<u>1,444^a</u>	<u>749</u>	<u>524</u>	<u>225</u>	<u>290</u>	<u>(65)</u>

^a891 patients were covered by Medicaid.

Although as shown above the relative proportion of patients needing wheelchairs varied considerably by facility, overall about 50 percent of the patients needed wheelchairs at the 14 facilities, which is comparable to the MMACS data for Georgia as a whole.

We trust this information is responsive to your request. Unless you publicly announce the report's contents earlier, no further distribution will be made until 30 days from its issue date. At that time, we will send copies to interested parties and make copies available to others upon request.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard L. Fogel". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "R".

Richard L. Fogel
Director